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## THE WEEK'S MESSAGE—No. 125.

From MISS CHARLOTTE M. MASON, Founder of the Parents' National Educational Union.



DO not know any more encouraging sign of the times than the increasing uneasiness of teachers. The results obtained are very pleasing, but yet teachers are not satisfied.

Just now this uneasiness is accentuated because schools are under high pressure to become vocational rather than educational. Not that the matter is ever put in this bald way; on the contrary, people say, "Train the muscles, give ordered exercise to the senses; this is the work for little children. When they are older, with faculties alert, they will be able to learn at school the employment by which they are to live. By the time they leave school they will have learnt to practise a trade, and society will be relieved of the burden of the inefficient and incapable."

This is vocational training, an easy and pleasant path, a gradual descent, very tempting to teachers because it offers rewards and praise and lightly-won success. The children like it, the teachers enjoy it, educational authorities are greatly interested, why in the world should teachers not be satisfied? Here, indeed, is a broad way, with every inducement to follow it! This system of vocational training is, in all good faith, called education, although—away with books, eschew spiritual (or intellectual) effort, learn to do, live to execute, are the watchwords of the movement. The notion is that children learn by doing, and that therefore vocational training is the same thing as education. Now, all that children learn by doing is to do the thing they are at work upon. All the thoughts they get in doing are concerned with the carpentering or enrolling they have in hand. They get the training proper to a heaver or an ant—not that they ever learn to work as perfectly!—while the glorious possibilities proper to a man are hindered and choked in the child, to find unlawful outlets, if any, in the days to come.

Now this is the sort of thing children think about and talk about. A class of small persons aged nine or ten were read-

ing Shakespeare's "King John." One child whispers to another, "But Constance was a very great lady, you should read her part with more *swank!*" or, again, a small boy of six means to have an exhibition of his pictures, and draws up a catalogue. This is the description of "a giant in red"—"This giant is inside out! He lives mostly on onions and parrots, and the black specks you see in the picture are the coats and hats of all



the people he has eaten." A little girl of six finds leather to put on the picture of Mary Queen of Scots "to comfort her in prison"; and Mary says, "Thank you, that is what I have been waiting for years." But every teacher has a stock of stories showing how children imitate and imagine; and to kill all that, strikes a thoughtful person as a sort of smothering of the Princess in the Tower!

The fact is, children require knowledge just as they require food; and, absolutely necessary as is the teaching of science, it is still true that "The proper knowledge for mankind is man," a knowledge to be got out of history, poetry, tales,

travel-books—so written that they are literature. "Sinbad the Sailor," "Waverley," "Robinson Crusoe," and, may I add, the history of Joseph, the travels of St. Paul, and the Gospel narratives (whose wonderful beauty we lose sight of because their vital importance is so great). Give children living books, the best we have, with little teaching, but with the inspiring sympathy and direction of an educated mind, and they grow spiritually; become persons of wise and understanding hearts, with many intellectual resources. They are educated for their own uses, and not merely for the advantage of society.

On the other hand, persons who cry out for vocational training and who say that boys and girls should leave school able to go on with useful work in the world have truth on their side. The fact is that the school has two functions—educational and vocational—and neither supersedes nor overlaps the other. The due and daily nourishing of the mind and the opening up of many interests belong to the former, while the equally due and necessary training of hand and eye, sense and muscle (even to the point of preparatory work in a given calling) belong to the latter.

A good many teachers, here and there, are beginning to look to the Parents' Union for help in adjusting these contrary claims. The philosophy of education by which our practice has been directed (for the last quarter of a century or more) is comprehensive. But perhaps the two outstanding principles are that education is of the spirit, not of the flesh (a principle lately enunciated with great effect by Lord Haldane); and next, that learning, and not teaching, is the business of the schools. Let teachers believe that knowledge is the sole concern of education, that knowledge is life, and that the knowledge of God is eternal life, and education will advance by leaps and bounds, personality will develop, and the children we bring up will be, as we would have them, greater and better than ourselves.

Charlotte M. Mason